VALENTINO

All Pact and Ready to Go!

A group of teen superheroes abandon their loner ways and join forces to become a super-team. Are we talking about the Teen Titans? The X-Men? The Legion of Super-Heroes? The Young Avengers?

Nah—nothing that organized. These teen superheroes exist in the Imageverse, and rather than forming an organized super-team with all the trappings, they've formed a pact to function as a team... and thus ***The Pact*** is born.

The Pact not only brings together four heroes, it also brings together four creators. Each issue of the four-part limited series is written by the creator of one of the four members of the team, beginning with ***ShadowHawk*** creator *Jim Valentino*, who does the honors on the first issue.

A super-team in the Imageverse? How'd it come about? "It was all *Jim Valentino's* fault," *Jay Faerber* explained. "I mean, *idea*. He saw the potential for some common ground to be shared by Invincible, Firebreather, ShadowHawk, and Zephyr, and he asked *Robert Kirkman, Phil Hester*, and me if we'd like to do a team book featuring the characters. I was really flattered—I always am, when someone wants to use one of my characters—so I was quick to sign on."

"The idea behind this started when we launched the super-hero line in February, 2001, I believe it was," Valentino explained. "I wanted to create a vehicle for ShadowHawk, I wanted to do a group book ('cause I *love* group books) and I was crazy about both Firebreather and Invincible—I thought they were great as visuals and in concept—so I wanted to include them.

"Things got in the way and when I finally got enough time to really sit down and think about the group it dawned on me that those three characters had more in common than merely being around seventeen: they all came from dysfunctional families. Firebreather's dad is an honest-to-God monster. Invincible's father is a planet conquering alien, ShadowHawk's father is against him being a super-hero, and once I realized that, it was easy to toss Zephyr into the mix as her whole *family* is dysfunctional! Teenagers from dysfunctional families—it just sounded so natural to me!"

"Apparently Mr. Valentino likes these characters and wants to see as much of them as possible!" *Phil Hester* added.

Don't think of them as a super-team in the traditional sense. "That is, they don't have a charter or a constitution, there are no rules, no initiation ceremony, they don't *call* themselves 'The Pact,'" Valentino said. They're more of a support group than anything else."

" They're a group of friends," Faerber continued. "That's an important aspect that I really try to emphasize in my issue. Basically, Zephyr and Firebreather don't really consider themselves "super-heroes," whereas ShadowHawk and Invincible most certainly do. I had a lot of fun comparing and contrasting the four characters."

"Jim made it clear from the start that he didn't want them to have a headquarters or secret handshake or anything like that," Hester said. "He wanted it to read like four teenagers who share common backgrounds and common problems and hang out together from time to time. Only a fellow super hero is going to be able to identify with bombing your parallel parking test in driver's ed because you were up late defusing nuclear bombs in a villain's subterranean lair.

"They get together to bitch about all the things that kids always complain about when they get together—parents, school, all of that," Valentino said. "They talk music, have pizza, they basically just hang. But, because they all have super-powers there's the added bit about the nature of heroism, what it means to each of them and how they view it. And, of course, whatever menace they have to face."

"Of course, in my story they are a full blown team with a headquarters and team uniforms, all the trappings of classic team comics," Hester added. "The fun in my story comes in exploring exactly how they wound up that way for at least an issue."

In case you're not familiar with the four heroes who star in ***The Pact***, here's a run-down on the roster. "Firebreather, Duncan Rosenblatt, is the son of an actual fire-breathing dragon named Belloc and a human woman (don't ask)," Valentino said. He's the least human of the bunch and has the hardest time fitting into a normal life. He can fly, is super-strong, is nearly invulnerable and, like the name suggests, can breathe fire!"

"He's not really into the hero thing," Hester added, "but he's desperate to find *somewhere* he belongs"

"Invincible, Mark Grayson, is the son of an alien super-being sent to conquer the Earth named Omni-Man and a human mother. He, too, can fly, is super-strong and is invincible! His powers are still developing and he may have more as time goes on. He's really the physically strongest member of the team."

"He's been through a lot, but doesn't really feel qualified to be handing out lessons on hero dos and don'ts to his peers," Hester explained.

"ShadowHawk is Eddie Collins, a recent transplant to New York City from the Mid-West," Valentino said. "Given the ShadowHawk helmet, he soon discovers that he is the reincarnation of a murdered shaman from Ancient Egypt and the last in a line of ShadowHawks that reach back across the Millennia." Hester categorizes him as "earnest and sometimes headstrong. Very likable."

"Zephyr is the youngest child of the Noble family (from ***Noble Causes***) the world's most famous super-hero family," Valentino said. "She has the power to control winds and the elements and is the richest and most famous in the group."

That fame is part of the problem, as Hester sees it. "She has to deal with a level of celebrity that only compounds the given problems of being a teen with powers."

And there will be a fifth member of the team—at least for one issue. "Quantum Girl is my creation for my issue only," Hester said. "Her mysterious presence and powers have bound the team on a mission that takes them far afield of their normally informal get-togethers."

"As for what brings them together, that's covered in Jim's first issue," Faerber said. "The come together when Firebreather's dad allegedly attacks the city, and the four kids wind up responding to the disaster (for various reasons)."

The creative approach to this series is—well, it's *creative*! "Each issue of the four-issue series is completely stand-alone," Faerber said. "Jim's kicks it off, but you don't have to read his to understand mine, and you don't have to read mine to understand Phil's, etc. Jim wrote and drew the first issue. I'm writing the second issue, which is drawn by *Valentine De Landro & Kris Justice*. The third issue is written by Phil and drawn by *Carlos Rodriguez*, and the fourth is written by *Robert Kirkman* and drawn by *Jason Howard*."

"The whole notion is one concept as envisioned by four authors, each of whom is the creator of one of the principal characters," Valentino added. "That's never been done before and it makes for an interesting contrast and experiment."

"Jim basically told us all to do our thing, so I wrote mine only having read a bare outline of Jim's story," Faerber continued. "I sent my script on to everyone for approval—in case I got some facet of their characters wrong, or whatever. But it was more for that reason, than so they could pick up on any plot threads. I didn't get any notes back from anyone, so I guess they all liked it. Either that, or everyone just deleted it when they saw another email from me in their inbox!"

"The only link is that they're all cool as hell!" Hester said.

Will anything in this series affect continuity for any of the core characters? "You mean beside the switching of powers, insanity and the fact that all four are outed as cross-dressers? Naw, not much," Valentino said, adding, "Now watch, someone's going to take that seriously and be really ticked when none of those things actually happen!"

"Kirkman has yet to tell anyone what his issue is about, so maybe he's planning on killing off Firebreather's mom and blaming it all on 'chaos magic,'" Faerber speculated. "I wouldn't be surprised."

"I think the challenge in the book is to create stories that help the characters *grow*, but not so drastically as to undercut anything going on in their home books," Hester said. "I'm using these stories as a tool to explore and refine some of the character developments established in the regular books."

Long-time comics readers may remember that Image started as largely a superhero company. In recent years, the company has attempted to re-emphasize superheroes, but they've never made any serious attempts at establishing a super-team until now. Is this something that should have been done earlier? "That's a tough question to answer, because there *is* no easy answer," Faerber said. "Some people like the Image super-hero books specifically because they *don't* have to read any other book to get the full picture. But at the same time, I know there's a segment of the super-hero audience that loves the idea of a cohesive universe, where characters acknowledge each other and stuff. Heck, I like that stuff, too. That's why you see so many cameos by other Image heroes within the pages of ***Noble Causes***."

"The Image superteam has been tried a couple of times," Valentino explained. "*Rob (Liefeld)* was the first to try it when he re-envisioned ***Brigade*** back in the day. He wanted one character from every partner house in the group. In the end only Erik and I consented and my guy, ShadowHawk, was in the process of dying. I tried it in ***Altered Image*** and the ***Sonic Super-Special (#7)*** where I teamed up one character from every studio plus the Maxx—but that was a one off kind of thing. And, of course, there were the inter-company cross-overs we did. Should it have been done more often? I don't know... would'a, could'a, should'a—it wasn't, so who's to say?"

"That sort of thing is very hard to coordinate without a strong editorial presence," Hester said. "The beauty of Image is that you are free to go anywhere you want with your book, but that also makes it nearly impossible to coordinate anything across the entire line."

"I had dinner recently with *Eric Stephenson, B. Clay Moore*, and *Robert Kirkman*, and we had a lengthy discussion about whether or not we should more tightly link the Image super-hero titles —or at least, give the appearance of such a link," Faerber said. "It's a matter of trying to have our cake and eat it, too. We want to retain the creative freedom that makes doing Image work so attractive, while still giving fans the notion that there's a Big Picture going on."

"I'm not sure that Image would benefit from a more connected universe," Valentino said. "The Ultraverse tried it, so did Cross-Gen, it didn't work for them. The thing is that the Marvel and DC Universes *grew* over a period of years, so readers were able to grow with the concept. It seems to me that every time someone has tried to create a universe whole cloth, it's failed. I think readers prefer

filling in the gaps and tying in the storylines on their own—I don't think they really like having everything handed to them and figured out ahead of time. The 'Image Universe' is and always has been pretty loose. There have been plenty of cross-overs and if a fan really wanted to they could probably pull a 'Roy Thomas' and make sense of it all. To be honest with you, it makes my nose bleed just thinking about it!"

While each creator retained "veto power" over any storyline that might have contradicted something he had planned, no one had to make use of the veto. "What I call 'super-group rules' applies," Valentino said. "When you have any group of solo characters (and this goes for team-ups, too) there has to be an understanding that you can't mess with another creator's continuity, just as you wouldn't want someone to mess with your character. *All* groups or team-ups that involve solo characters follow this rule. It's a question of courtesy and respect..."

"I know Jim initially wanted to use Omni-Man in his story, but Robert asked that he not. So there is some give and take going on," Faerber said. "But we're all familiar with the way it works when you're playing with other peoples' toys—you just put 'em back the way you found 'em, and it's all good."

"It's pretty intimidating for me to see these guys who really know how to write spinning a good super hero line and I'm sort of just feeling my way!" Hester added modestly.

"I think there's enough mutual respect for one another as creators that we were all comfortable with it--so it became a mutually supportive round-robin," Valentino said, adding that "we *do* have the freedom to advise one another about the handling of our characters. For example, Robert helped me out with a conversation between Invincible and Atom Eve, making the conversation flow more naturally between them."

While previous attempts at establishing a crossover team have met with limited success, Faerber is optimistic about ***The Pact's*** chances. "I think ***The Pact*** has more of a chance of succeeding now because the creators involved are much more on the same page. We're working towards a common goal. It's a rather attainable one, too. All we want to do is show these characters interacting with each other. And it looks like we've succeeded."

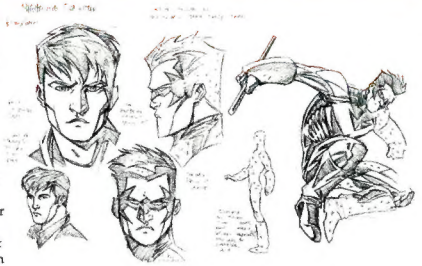
The Pact #1, a $2.99 comic, is scheduled for mid-March release.

BY CLIFF BIGGERS

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Comic Shop Newsarama

Hester & Parks On the 'Wing



For more than four years, *Phil Hester & Ande Parks* have supplied the visuals for DC's ***Green Arrow,*** working with such writers as *Kevin Smith, Brad Meltzer, & Judd Winick*. But now the illustrative duo are leaving Star City for new environs... and they're hooking up with another nomad who's left his old stomping grounds behind.

Dick Grayson is also looking for a new home, having decided that Bludhaven was no longer the right place for him... and beginning with ***Nightwing #107,*** Grayson will be joined by Hester & Parks in his search for a new home.

What led the two long-time ***Green Arrow*** illustrators to move to a new project? "Ande and I knew our time on ***Green Arrow*** was coming to an end," Hester told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Benjamin Ong Pang Kean*. "We'd been on it for four years and needed a change of pace. We let DC, and specifically the Bat office, know we would love to stay in the DCU and *Nachie Castro* offered ***Nightwing*** as one of his first acts as editor of the book. Nachie was one of our former editors on ***Green Arrow,*** so it was an easy decision to work with him again.

"*Dan DiDio* told us he wanted ***Nightwing*** to get a bit of a push this year and he felt having a stable art team on the book was a step in that direction. It all went down between San Diego and Chicago last summer. We still had a few issues of ***Green Arrow*** to go when we knew we had ***Nightwing*** as our next gig."

Nightwing will mark Hester's first prolonged experience with the Bat-family. His only experience prior to this was illustrating "Batman in a couple of issues of ***Detective*** and in guest appearances in ***Green Arrow***. [As for] Nightwing, never. I spent some time before penciling working out our 'look' for Dick Grayson & co. Ande is cuckoo for Batman, so this book, with its frequent Bat-sightings, is a lot of fun for him."

As Hester sees it, Nightwing plays a crucial role in the whole Bat-saga. "Well, you can't understand Batman until you understand Robin. I know when I was a kid, I was dead set against Robin. I thought he was silly. I never wanted to be Robin, I wanted to be Batman. But as a grown-up, and now a comic book creator, I see the balance Dick Grayson's character brought to an otherwise overly grim Batman.

"*Frank Miller's* said it many time, but I'll try and paraphrase here: Bruce Wayne is crime fighter because he's motivated by his parents' murders, but he's Batman because it's fun. No one identifies with Batman because we think it would be cool to be obsessed with vengeance; we want to be Batman because it would be awesome. To me, Robin—and to an extent, Dick—is the personification of that joyful aspect of being Batman.

"Dick Grayson is one of DC's oldest characters. He's been around for everything. Bottom line, he's a cool character and deserves a little more exposure. DC seems to know when they need to dust off a character and return him or her to prominence rather than simply junk them.

"That long life may also be the reason he's on the back burner for a lot of fans. They think they already know all there is to know about him, so why bother? When a character has a ton of history you can easily spend all your time sort of servicing his continuity, just maintaining his status quo. I think DC recognizes that he's a character with a ton of potential outside of all those back story entanglements. I hope we're presenting him in a way that makes him interesting to readers who couldn't give a hang about his past while still being faithful to the established character."

Hester is still working on getting to know Nightwing. "I'm trying to balance the intensity of Batman with the joyfulness of Robin. He's powerful and dark, like Batman, at the same time, lithe and playful like Robin. In some ways he's a better hero than Batman. I think he has a better perspective on fighting evil in general, whereas Batman seems so focused on Gotham City and his rogues gallery."

Hester has spent a fair amount of time developing just the right look for ***Nightwing***. "Nightwing is a Bat-book, and I hope my naturally dark, angular tendencies will play well in the back alleys of Bludhaven and Gotham City. Nightwing has a little more frenetic, bouncy energy than Green Arrow, so I'm trying to capture that gestural energy when drawing him. It's the change I was looking for when I left ***Green Arrow***.

"We also get to handle covers on the book and that's been a welcome challenge. As an artist, it really helps crystallize what's happening in the book to have to focus on one image from the story that engages the reader in an unexpected way."

Taking on a new book means working with a new writer as well. in the case of Nightwing, that writer is *Devin Grayson*, who returns as of ***Nightwing #107*** after the *Chuck Dixon-Scott Beatty* six-issue "Nightwing: Year One" run. "Devin is totally invested in the character and has a definite long term arc in mind for him. She really lives in his world. Her scripts are full of so much information that the reader will never see that build a back story and foundation for every character in the book. She's also an open, friendly collaborator.

"I don't want to give anything away, but I think a lot of her mission is giving Nightwing an identity outside of Batman's long shadow. She's setting out to prove he's more than 'Robin grown-up' or 'Batman-lite,' and I'm confident she's going to make it. This first arc is all about Dick regaining his identity as a crime fighter and how far he'll go for to do it."

Nightwing #107 is slated for mid-April release.

Graphix Detail

Last month saw the release of the first volume of Graphix' full-color repackaging of *Jeff Smith's* entire ***Bone*** saga. However, it turns out that ***Bone*** is just one facet of Graphix' publishing plan.

"The idea for Graphix first popped into my head about three years ago, but it was also the culmination of many years of musing about creating comics for children," Graphix Creative Director *David Saylor* told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Matt Brady*. "I began to see the possibilities of having talented artists from the world of comic books create picture books for young children. After all, picture books spring from the same dynamic: putting words and pictures together to create stories."

It's safe to say that Scholastic had been watching the explosion of the graphic novel market of the past few years with keen interest. "But since Scholastic is a children's-only publisher, naturally what was striking to us was how little was being published for kids, beyond the superhero and manga areas," Saylor said. "That's where we felt we could make a difference and reach a wide audience.

"Our mission is to publish age-appropriate comics for kids that focus on exceptional art, rich content, and strong storytelling applied to realistic fiction, fantasy, sci-fi, and non-fiction. We're especially interested in artists and writers that bring a strong personal vision to the material." And what stronger all-ages project to launch the Graphix line than Smith's ***Bone?***

Of course, the ***Bone*** reprinting will continue, with Graphix releasing two volumes per year until the release of the ninth and final volume in 2009. Readers can expect to see a new volume every six months in both trade paperback and hardcover.

Graphix' next major release is ***Queen Bee*** by *Chynna Clugston-Major*. : "Queen Bee is a funny, but stinging look at the social hive of middle-school girls, at the center of which are rival sisters with super powers," Saylor said.

"Spring '06 brings the launch of the first ***Babysitter's Club*** graphic novel, illustrated and adapted by *Raina Telgemeier*. Based on *Ann M. Martin's* fabulous best-selling series, America's favorite babysitters are back in a fresh and utterly engaging adaptation.

"Summer '06 will feature ***High School Confidential*** by *Aimee Friedman*, with artwork by *Christine Norrie*. ***HSC*** is a hip and pithy look at high school friendships—and fashion."

Currently unscheduled projects coming from Graphix include:

- ***The Seventh Voyage,*** adapted and illustrated by *Jon J Muth*, from a *Stanislaw Lem* story. "Caught in a time warp, a hapless astronaut meets his past and future selves as they attempt to fix their broken rocket ship." Saylor said.
- ***The Last Unicorn,*** adapted by *Peter Beagle*, author of the fantasy masterpiece first published in 1968. "We're actively looking for artists—Perhaps there's an artist out there who feels they were destined to illustrate this poignant classic?"
- ***Romeo and Juliet:*** "A fresh take on Shakespeare's play, adapted by *Tina Packer*, artistic director of ***Shakespeare and Company***. We're talking with an artist and this promises to be an exciting interpretation that will engage kids with its contemporary setting."

Saylor said that Graphix is actively looking for more projects, both to adapt as well as to present to new readers under the Graphix imprint. "If the fit is right with Scholastic, we'd be interested in looking for more completed comics work such as ***Bone***. When it makes sense for us—and for the creators—we're eager to re-publish comics that have already been published and to make them available to a larger audience."

Graphix is also looking to develop new properties as well, in a field which has gown to include a handful of new publishers all aimed at the same demographic as Graphix, Saylor said. "Our goal is to focus on creator-driven books that have a strong artistic and editorial viewpoint. I want artists to know that they are the creative source: we're here to support them and to create comics together that kids will love reading. And if we achieve that, then we're publishing successfully...

"The more that's published, the more attention, space in bookstores, and excitement might be generated for this new wave of comics for kids. But, for any of us, the publishers, what it comes down to is making books that kids and adults will be eager to buy and support because they are simply *great books*. I think there is a danger of disappointing readers with mediocre material, so at Graphix we're taking measured steps and not cranking out dozens of books too quickly. Making good books, and certainly good comic books, takes lots of time, so the key is to make the right acquisitions and to spend the time necessary to develop and market the books properly. This is a great moment for comic book artists and for book publishers. I'm glad that Graphix is part of it."

Image Has Ants

When he first began working on his superheroine series ***Ant,*** creator *Mario Gully* had hoped his creation would appear under the Image "i." And now, in a testimonial to determination, Gully's wish is coming true!

This September, ***Ant*** will debut from the house of new ideas. "I have been bugging Image for years," Gully told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Benjamin Ong Pang Kean*. "My goal has always been to be at Image. I love the company. You can see it in my style of art. I bothered [Image Publisher] *Erik [Larsen]* until he gave me a chance to prove that I was ready for 'prime time,' as he calls it. At first on the fence about my ability as a new and young creator in the doors at Image. I had to prove that I was up for the majors. I think I proved it with my new stuff. And that was that.

"***Ant*** did very well at Arcana. I think pretty much all the ***Ant*** books are gone. The response of the book overall has been overwhelming. Now that I'm on the best playing field for ***Ant*** that could possibly happen. I think things are gonna be even better."

In case you missed out on the Arcana run, here's a synopsis: ***Ant*** focuses on a little girl over-

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coming obstacles in her life and growing up to become the greatest hero ever. "A real hero," Gully said. "That started from nothing. ***Ant*** is a reflection of my own personal life. I came from nothing. No art background. No history drawing for Marvel under my belt. Just a poor kid with ambition. I created Ant under very hard conditions for hope of a better tomorrow. I wanted to be a comic book artist. That's all. But that was a dream I thought I would have never imagined. Ant is just that."

Larsen followed Gully's work on ***Ant*** in its Arcana run and was impressed with what he saw. "There are a number of creators who have, over time, proven through hard work that they are 'Image-worthy,'" Larsen said. "I saw ***Ant*** as a book that was very raw, very rough—but one with a lot of potential. *Mario Gully's* work has improved over the years and he has grown a great deal as both a writer and an artist and it simply got to a point where he could no longer be ignored.

"That was what I responded to – not so much what ***Ant*** *was*, but rather what ***Ant*** *could be*. When I talked to Mario about the book, I came to him with a number of concerns and suggestions and Mario surprised me by rattling off a number of changes he wanted to make to his book and before I could say anything, he'd addressed them all. We were really seeing eye-to-eye on this.

"I expect that ***Ant*** is really going to turn some heads. Those already familiar with ***Ant*** will be surprised to see the new twists being injected into the title and Mario's art has taken a huge leap. He's really at a new level.

"At this point, what I'm looking to see is Ant get integrated into the Image Universe and that's a first step."

That Image integration is an idea that appeals to Gully, who has plans to use some iconic Image characters in future issues of ***Ant***. "The new ***Ant*** series takes place a year after ***Ant #4***. Hanna is all grown up and is putting the pieces back together in her life. She woke up in a mental hospital and realized she isn't eight years old anymore. A traumatic event occurs when she was Ant and now she is trying to live up to the hype of being the greatest hero this world has ever known. But she doesn't remember being Ant at all and that is only half of her battles.

"In the first story arc she battles a great enemy of the The Savage Dragon. And Ant goes head to head with the big guy Spawn in issue #3! I can't say more than that right now. This is gonna be a wild ride for Image fans, I assure you that."

NY-Next

Almost a year and a half after its debut, and nine month's since the last published issue reached comic shops, NYX is about to return! Marvel has confirmed that the final two issues of the series are slated for release this summer, supplemented by the release of two ***Marvel Must Have*** editions reprinting the sold-out earlier issues so that new readers can get "up to speed" on the series that first introduced X-23 to the Marvel Universe.

Joe Quesada will continue as writer for the final two issues of the series; he will be joined by artist *Robert Teranishi*, who illustrated ***NYX #5*** (the last released issue). Editor *C.B. Cebulski* explained why there was such a lag between #s 4 & 5, and a subsequent delay between #s 5 & 6. "After *Josh Middleton* [artist of the first four issues] left and *Robert Teranishi* came on board with issue #5, there were some growing pains in getting Rob adjusted to the style and match what Josh was doing," Cebulski said. "Josh is such a fantastic artist, and was handling everything from pencils to inks to color on the book, so we had to find Rob an inker and a colorist who, together would be able to…not match, but at least appear similar to Josh's work from the first four issues.

"We worked hard on that, and think it worked well – that was why there was such a delay between #4 and #5. Now, between #5 and #6 – there's been another substantial delay, which was due to more personal things that got in the way with Joe and Rob, individually. Once everyone was back and running, and back in full health, we've been working on ***NYX #6 & #7***. We've been doing pretty quietly to get a bunch in the can so that we can actually release it after we announce that it's coming. We wanted to make sure we had enough ready to go, so that by the time it's solicited, both issues will be done."

For those who are trying to figure out how ***NYX*** and ***X-23*** relate, Cebulski offers a chronology. "The last page of *Craig Kyle's* ***X-23*** series will lead directly into where she showed up in ***NYX #3*** for the first time," Cebulski explained. "In ***X-23***, you're going to find out how she came to be in the position she was in when we first saw her in New York City. After the ***NYX*** storyline, her next chronological story is the one that began in ***Uncanny X-Men #450***."

NYX #6 is slated for June release, while ***NYX #7***, a double-sized issue, will follow in July.

Ins & Outs

In! *Todd McFarlane's* Spawn story for the ***Image HC*** (originally planned as the ***Image 10th Anniversary HC***, but the schedule slipped just a bit...) has been completed and turned in. No word at press-time on when the ***Image HC*** might see print, though; it's likely that Image will resolicit for the book, which means that it won't reach comic shops until late summer or early fall. (And in case you forgot, this hardcover features new stories by Image founders *Erik Larsen*, *Todd McFarlane*, *Marc Silvestri*, and *Jim Valentino* featuring their most famous Image characters.)

Out! Parts one, three, and four of *Kurt Busiek*, *Ron Garney*, & *Dan Green's* "JLA: Syndicate Rules" story arc have entirely sold out from DC (that's ***JLA #s 107, 109, & 110***, for those of you keeping track. "This is great! I'm thrilled to hear that it's doing this well," Busiek said. "It's been fun to see the audience reaction as this story has built, ramping up in tension every month. We're at the halfway point now, and things have just broken open big time. ***JLA #111*** is a major smackdown between the JLA and the CSA that changes everything, and after that, it keeps getting bigger and the stakes keep getting higher—battles on Earth, in space, in the anti-matter universe, and Justice Leaguers being rung in to help from the reserves and the Elite."

In! ***Black Panther #1*** by *Reginald Hudlin & John Romita Jr.*, which is coming back into print with a second edition in mid-March. The second printing will feature a new variant cover by *Esad Ribic*.

Out! ***Bloodrayne: Skies Afire***, the premiere ***Bloodrayne*** oneshot from Echo 3 Worldwide and Digital Webbing, has sold out of its first printing. To meet the strong demand for the videogame-inspired comic, the publishers are going back to print with a second edition that will feature a blueline sketch version of the *Romano Molenaar* cover and four additional pages of behind-the-scenes material.

In! *Scott McDaniel*, who is taking over as artist of ***Robin*** beginning with the June issue. Look for more info from McDaniel in next week's *CSN*.

Coming Comics
DC in May

In case you hadn't heard, there's a Batman movie coming—and that means oodles of ***Batman Begins***-related goodies from DC! Of course, it all starts with the ***Batman Begins Movie Adaptation***, brought to you by *Scott Beatty, Kilian Plunkett, & Sergio LaPointe*. In case you've been in solitary confinement for the past year and have no idea what's going on, ***Batman Begins*** explores the origins of the Batman legend and the Dark Knight's emergence as a force for good in Gotham. This adaptation is also collected with other key Batman stories in ***Batman Begins: The Movie & Other Tales of the Dark Knight***, a trade paperback featuring an assortment of recent and rarely seen Batman adventures.(While they're solicited with the May releases, these books won't actually be available until June, just before the release of the film.)

DC Direct has several items to offer as well, including the ***Batman Begins: Christian Bale as Batman Statue, Batman Begins: Batmobile Replica, Batman Begins: Batarang Prop Replica, Batman Begins: Batman in Flight Statue, Batman Begins: Batman on Rooftop Statue, Batman Begins: Christian Bale as Batman Bust, Batman Begins: 13" Christian Bale as Batman Deluxe Collector Figure, Batman Begins: Christian Bale as Batman Mini-Statue, Batman Begins: Ken Watanabe as Ra's Al ghul Mini-Statue***, and the ***Batman Begins: Cillian Murphy as Scarecrow Mini-Statue***, all slated for advance release in late April and May.

Superman guest-stars in ***Batman #640*** by *Judd Winick, Doug Mahnke, & Tom Nguyen*. Batman travels to Metropolis to visit an old friend, known to the world as the Man of Steel! Meanwhile, the mysterious Red Hood joins Onyx in an attack on Gotham's sadistic crime boss, the Black Mask!

Bruce Jones makes his DC Universe debut in May, joining artist *Sean Murphy* for a two-issue miniseries exploring the formative experiences of one of Batman's most frightful adversaries. ***Year One: Batman/Scarecrow***. goes back to the very beginning, to Jonathan Crane's birth and questionable lineage, and follows his story up to his first appearance taking on Batman and Robin!

Batman Villains Secret Files 2005 offers a look into the world of Batman's enemies, as seen through the eyes of one of their own. Learn why Gotham City is such a magnet for crime and discover the secrets of the shape-changing supervillain Clayface.

Steve Englehart & Marshall Rogers reunite for a history-making second foray into the world of Batman and Silver St. Cloud in ***Batman: Dark Detective***, a six-part biweekly limited series that picks up where their acclaimed 1970's run left off. This miniseries pits the Dark Knight against the most famous and feared members of his Rogues Gallery! In the startling debut issue, the Joker enters a gubernatorial election using the campaign slogan "Vote for me or I'll kill you!" Will it persuade voters? Plus, Bruce Wayne's old love interest Silver St. Cloud returns, as do Two-Face and the Scarecrow!

The über-assassin Deathstroke has maneuvered Batgirl into a deathtrap! Now she must square off against the daughter of the DCU's deadliest hit man. And just who is this daughter of the stone cold killer? You know this belle of the blade as…the Ravager! See what happens in ***Batgirl #64*** by *Anderson Gabrych, Ale Garza, & Jesse Delperdang*.

The revamping of the DCU's mystical elements continues in ***Day of Vengeance #2*** by *Bill Willingham, Justiniano, & Walden Wong*, one of four miniseries spinning out of the events of ***DC Countdown***. The uneasy alliance known as the Shadowpact has formed to protect the world from another unholy partnership: the Spectre and the new Eclipso, who wage a fearsome campaign to wipe out all magic!

Metamorpho guest-stars in ***Doom Patrol #12*** by *John Byrne & Doug Hazlewood*. The horrible truth of the Chief's past comes to light as an old adversary returns to finish the job he started so long ago — and this time, Niles Caulder must die!

Peter David, David Lopez, & Fernando Blanco present the conclusion to "Sacred Cows" in ***Fallen Angel #20*** as the Fallen Angel goes toe-to-toe with Sachs and Violens for her life. Meanwhile, the power players of Bête Noire are about to turn on each other, and very few will be left when the explosions stop and the smoke clears!

The waiting is over, and history is about to be remade as Hal Jordan once again returns to his rightful role, starring in the ***Green Lantern*** relaunch brought to you by *Geoff Johns, Carlos Pacheco, & Jesus Merino*. This special forty-page debut issue kicks off the three-part tale "No Fear." Spinning out of the pages of ***Green Lantern: Rebirth***, Hal Jordan returns to the DCU as the Emerald Warrior, ready to reclaim his life and the light of the Green Lantern. But the forces of darkness have already begun to rise, looking to claim the power of the Green Lantern for themselves!

Kurt Busiek, Ron Garney, & Dan Green's eight-part "Syndicate Rules" concludes in ***JLA #114***. It's the final showdown — the Qwardians vs. the Crime Syndicate, with the JLA trapped in the middle! It's a slam-bang, all-action finale with revelations and upheavals that'll change the CSA — and the JLA as well.

Get ready for an extra-sized anniversary issue as *Judd Winick, Tom Fowler, & Rodney Ramos'* ***Green Arrow #50*** guest-stars Batman — and the Outsiders! It's a battle royal in Star City as Green Arrow and his Team Green join forces with Gotham City's Dark Knight and the Outsiders to take on the robotic menace of the Duke of Oil, the impossibly lethal Drakon, the brutal Brick, and the man pulling everyone's strings: The Riddler!

The events of ***Day of Vengeance*** reverberate in *Geoff Johns, Don Kramer, & Keith Champagne's* ***JSA #73***. This issue kicks off the three-part "Black Vengeance," a sequel to last year's "Black Reign." Free from the soul of Hal Jordan and evil of Parallax, the Spectre journeys to deliver vengeance across the globe — and it begins in the homeland of Black Adam. Captain Marvel returns to the JSA as the team ventures once again into enemy territory to face one of the most powerful forces in the DCU!

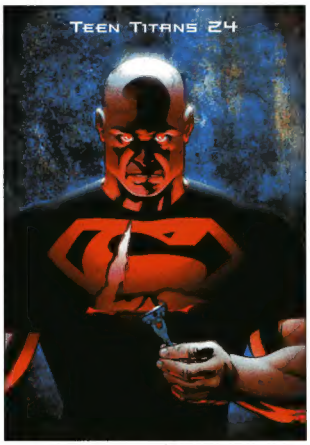
The secret of the threat from beyond the stars is revealed in *Mark Waid, Barry Kitson, & Art Thibert's* ***Legion of Super-Heroes #6***, causing a chain reaction that affects every Legionnaire and every life in the galaxy! If you thought you knew which side to root for in the 31st century — think again!

The second miniseries spinning out of ***DC Countdown*** continues in *Greg Rucka & Jesus Saiz's* ***The Omac Project #2***. When the JLA discovers the existence of the powerful, hero-monitoring Brother Eye satellite, battle lines are drawn between Batman and Superman! And Checkmate operative Sasha Bordeaux struggles with a secret act of treason — just as her agency commands the OMAC Project to kill!

The creative revamp of DC's core Superman titles gets underway in May with the debut of three teams—some entirely new to the books, some partly new. ***Action Comics #827*** introduces the all-new team of *Gail Simone, John Byrne, & Nelson*, kicking off with a story that finds Dr. Polaris seeking Superman's protection from a new mistress of magnetism: Repulse! Over in ***Adventures of Superman #640***, writer *Greg Rucka* is joined by new artist *Karl Kerschl*, fresh from his work on the acclaimed ***Majestic*** miniseries, for a storyline that begins with the unmasking of Ruin. Then ***Smallville*** writer and supervising producer *Mark Verheiden* joins artist *Ed Benes* as they take over the Man of Steel's flagship title with ***Superman #217***. After the events of the past months, Superman has left Metropolis and created a new Fortress of Solitude in the Amazon jungle. Lois and Jimmy come to find him, only to meet some unexpected resistance and the emergence of a new major threat to the entire DCU!

Are Superman and Batman guilty of murder? The Maximums certainly think so — and where they come from, it's an eye for an eye! The battle of the century continues in *Jeph Loeb, Ed McGuinness, & Dexter Vines'* ***Superman/Batman #21*** as The World's Finest duo take on the super squad of avenging heroes — to the death!

Mike Kennedy & Carlos Meglia invite readers to pay a visit to a very strange town in ***Superman: Infinite City***, an original hardcover graphic novel. When powerful weapons ravage Metropolis, Clark Kent and Lois Lane travel to an old mid-western town to discover their roots. What they find is the abandoned town of Infinite City! After traveling through a portal, they're transported to a place beyond their imagination, where futuristic technology and magic coexist. But not everyone is happy living there, and they want to come to our world, no matter what the price. Can Superman defeat his doppelganger, the Warden — a being as powerful as he? And what of the architect behind it all: Jor-El?



"The Insiders," a 4-part crossover between the ***Teen Titans*** and ***Outsiders***, begins in ***Teen Titans #24*** by *Geoff Johns, Matthew Clark, & Mark Farmer*. For months, Superboy has been taunted by the secrets of his DNA — that he's a clone created from Superman and Lex Luthor. But who cloned him, and why? Superboy may not have too much time to focus on that question, though, because the Titans and the Outsiders are about to be rocked to the core as they face two of the most powerful villains in the DCU in an all-out war to destroy the young teams! The story continues into *Judd Winick & Carlos D'Anda's* ***Outsiders #24***.

The third ***DC Countdown*** spinoff miniseries debuts in May courtesy of *Dave Gibbons, Ivan Reis, & Marc Campos*. Picking up plot threads from the sleeper hit ***Adam Strange*** miniseries, this tale focuses on DC's space heroes. Adam Strange, Green Lantern, Hawkman, Hawkgirl, and a cast of DC's greatest space adventurers come together to face an evil forged in the depths of Thanagar; an evil that threatens to bring down two planets and countless civilizations.

The final ***DC Countdown*** spinoff miniseries also kicks off in May. ***Villains United*** brings together some of the DC Universe's most malevolent bad guys in a limited series by *Gail Simone, Dale Eaglesham, & Wade Von Grawbadger*. This isn't just a dysfunctional family reunion, though, for within the ranks of the world's vilest villains something perhaps even more wicked is brewing, and only the mysterious being code-named Mockingbird has all the answers.

Greg Rucka, Rags Morales, & Michael Bair continue the "Bronze Doors" storyline in the biweekly ***Wonder Woman #s 216 & 217*** as the Teen Titans' Wonder Girl guests in a story that finds the blinded Diana going into the depths of Hell in search of a valuable prize. And then, "The Bronze Doors" close with a bang as Diana's quest comes to an unexpected end!

It's the book that no comics connoisseur will want to be without! ***The World's Greatest Super-Heroes Oversized Slipcase HC*** compiles six of the most stunning standalone tales of the past decade in one 9" x 12" hardcover edition. This book compiles *Paul Dini & Alex Ross's* six oversized tales—***Superman: Peace on Earth, Batman: War on Crime, Shazam!: Power of Hope, Wonder Woman: Spirit of Truth, JLA: Secret Origins,*** and ***JLA: Liberty & Justice***—in a handsome permanent edition that'll be a centerpiece of any great comics collection. These classic works for all ages feature the iconic DC characters in a unique storytelling format that combines aspects of both comics and picture books. Also included are several pages of promotional art, preliminary art and thumbnails, art done for DC Direct product, model-to-finished-painting comparisons, reflections by the book's creators, and much more! This landmark volume also features an introduction by noted book designer and author *Chip Kidd*, a new painted cover by *Alex Ross*, and an 8-page foldout of the ***JLA: Liberty & Justice*** poster featuring every member of the JLA by Ross. This book is advance solicited; look for it in July.

DC collected editions for May include:

- ***Batman: Broken City***, collecting the six-part story arc by *Brian Azzarello & Eduardo Risso*;
- ***The Batman Strikes Volume One: Crime Time***, collecting the first five issues of ***The Batman Strikes*** in one bargain-priced digest-sized edition;
- ***Gotham Central: Half a Life***, presenting the Renee Montoya storyline from ***Gotham Central #s 6-10*** by *Greg Rucka, Michael Lark, Jason Pearson, William Rosado, Cam Smith, & Steve Mitchell*;
- ***Hawkman: Wings of Fury***, collecting ***Hawkman #s 15-22*** by *Geoff Johns, Rags Morales,* and others;
- ***JSA: The Golden Age***, a new edition of the classic tale by *James Robinson & Paul Smith*;
- ***Nightwing: On the Razor's Edge***, collecting ***Nightwing #s 52 & 54-60***;
- ***Justice League Unlimited Volume One: United They Stand***, collecting the first five issues of ***Justice League Unlimited*** in one bargain-priced digest-sized edition;
- ***Superman in Action Comics Archives Volume Four***, a hardcover compilation of classic Golden Age Superman stories from ***Action Comics #s 53-68***, supplemented by a *William Schelly* introduction;
- ***Superman: The Wrath of Gog***, collecting the *Chuck Austen-Ivan Reis* storyline from ***Action Comics #s 814-819***, along with the backups from ***Action #s 812-813***;
- ***Teen Titans: Beast Boys & Girls***, collecting ***Teen Titans #s 13-15***, the storyline that explored the origins of Gar Logan; and
- ***Wrath of the Spectre***, a trade paperback compiling the ironic-retribution storylines by *Michael Fleisher, Jim Aparo, Ernie Chua, & Frank Thorne* that originally appeared in ***Adventure Comics #s 431-440*** and ***Wrath of the Spectre #4***.

Coming Comics 2000AD•DC in May

The A.B.C. Warriors are back in ***ABC Warriors Volume Two: The black Hole*** by *Pat Mills & Simon Bisley*. When the far-future evil empire of Termight begins experimenting with time-travel, they unleash a force that could destroy the entire universe!

Finnigan Sinister and Ramone Dexter, gun-sharks: hired killers with chalk outlines around their souls, return in *Dan Abnett, Sean Philips, Greg Staples, Simon Davis, & Steve Yeowell's* ***Sinister Dexter Volume Three: Slay Per View***. This time around, Ramone's got a serious problem — he thinks he might be a notorious serial killer called the Blevmoi Butcher!

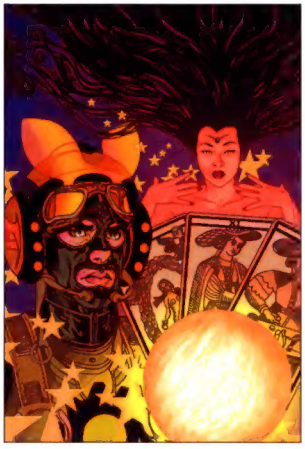
Cassandra Anderson is a member of Psi-Division, the psychic section of the Justice Department. A precognitive telepath and empath, she can detect crimes before they're even committed! See her in action in ***Judge Anderson Volume One: Anderson, Psi-Division*** by *John Wagner, Alan Grant, Brett Ewins, Cliff Robinson, Robin Smith, Barry Kitson, Jeff Anderson & Will Simpson*.

Coming Comics Humanoids•DC in May

Geoff Johns, Grimminger, & Butch Guice present an action-packed tale of Greek gods as epic in scope as the legends from which it springs in ***Olympus,*** an original graphic novel making its debut here. Chaos ensues as a group of brash archaeology students and a team of ruthless mercenaries are trapped together on the legendary Mount Olympus — a mountain populated by the deadliest monsters known to Greek legend!

In ***Different Ugliness, Different Madness,*** *Marc Malés* tells a heart-wrenching story of two people learning to rely on each other to overcome the pain of their physical and emotional wounds as their relationship blooms into one of trust and rebirth. In the golden age of radio, the attractive and sexy voice of Lloyd Goodman — the playboy of radio — fills the airwaves. But he has a secret — his voice is as dazzling as his face is repulsive. Lloyd is so embarrassed by his appearance that he hides it by hiring a handsome stand-in for public appearances. Finally fed up with maintaining the lie, Lloyd disappears from the limelight. Helen, a stunningly beautiful woman, fights with the terrible memories of her twin sister's death; memories that threaten to tear her hold on reality to shreds. Wandering through the countryside, Helen has a chance encounter with the now reclusive Lloyd Goodman. Their meeting will send them down paths that will change their lives forever.

Alexandro Jodorovsky & Juan Gimenez continue the story of the ultimate bloodline of warriors in ***Metabarons Volume Three: Steelhead & Dona Vicenta.*** Steelhead, the ruthless cyborg Metabaron, shakes the galaxy with a reign of violence. But when he falls in madly in love with Doña Vicenta, Steelhead decides to prove himself worthy of love.



Coming Comics WildStorm•DC in May

Brian K. Vaughan, Tony Harris, & Tom Feister offer a special standalone entry point to the world of Mayor Hundred in ***Ex Machina #11.*** Hundred's administration wages war against the countless fortune tellers who cost gullible New Yorkers hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. But when a mysterious palm reader knows intimate details about the super-heroic Great Machine's past, the Mayor must make a difficult decision about his own future.

Warren Ellis & J.H,. Williams join forces for the new bimonthly ongoing series ***Desolation Jones.*** The lone survivor of a horrific experiment called the Desolation Test, Desolation Jones just lived through a full year of constant, sleepless agony. A former British intelligence operative, the retired Jones is making ends meet in the private sector as a detective-for-hire to the covert community of ex-spooks who are living whatever life they can in L.A. It's a dirty, ugly job, but someone has to do it — and that man is Desolation Jones.

Devin Grayson & Brian Stelfreeze join forces for ***Matador,*** an explosive miniseries pitting Lt. Isabel Cardona against a deadly serial killer! Dismissed as a quota minority hire by her work peers, Cuban-born and Florida-bred Detective Isabel Cardona makes no friends on the Miami force by insisting that a series of seemingly unrelated murder cases lead to an urban-legend killer known

only as "The Matador." Proving his existence soon becomes her only way to prove her sanity — but how close to the dangerous Matador will Cardona have to get to make that happen?

The secret history of The Drummer is revealed at last in ***Planetary #23*** by *Warren Ellis & John Cassaday.* With Elijah now hiding his actions from the rest of the team, it's down to The Drummer to work out what Elijah's really doing, what he should be doing, and why...

Thundercats: Enemy's Pride collects the miniseries by *John Layman & Udon Studios.*

Alan Moore & Gene Ha pay a return visit to the world of ***Top Ten*** in the original hardcover graphic novel ***Top Ten: The Forty-Niners,*** a tale that delves into the past, revealing the origins of Neopolis and the first officers of Top Ten! Neopolis is the city of the future, but it's also full of the roughest and toughest heroes and villains the world has ever known. You've met the cast of ***Top Ten*** — Smax, King Peacock, Toybox, Joe Pi and more. Now meet their forebears, who blazed the trail and made Neopolis the city it is today!

Coming Comics Vertigo•DC in May

Enrique Breccia returns to the swamps, joining writer *Joshua Dysart* for the four-part "Healing the Breach" beginning in ***Swamp Thing #15.*** A forgotten figure from Alec Holland's early years appears in the swamp, seeking healing and perhaps redemption. And it may not be mere coincidence that his visit comes at a time when the waters of Louisiana face an ecological threat such as no one has ever encountered — not even Swamp Thing.

Vertigo collected editions for May include:

•***Hellblazer: Red Sepulchre,*** collecting ***Hellblazer #s 175-180*** by *Mike Carey, Steve Dillon, & Marcelo Frusin;* and

•***The Losers: Trifecta,*** collecting ***The Losers #s 13-19*** by *Andy Diggle, Jock, Dragotta, & Ale Garza.*

Coming from DC Direct in September

A 1970 Barracuda muscle car grafted onto an XTRA-Large Robot – Megas XLR will stop an invasion of Earth by the Clorfts aided by teen Gearhead Coop. Now you can add a cold-cast porcelain replica of this robo-car to your collection in the form of the ***Megas XLR Statue.***

The Alex Ross JLA series continues with ***Justice League Alex Ross Series Two,*** featuring Ross-based figures of ***Aquaman, Batman, Black Canary, Black Manta, & Parasite.*** Each features multiple point of articulation and a display base; some also include distinctive accessories.

DC assembles 6" figures of Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, Batman, and Aquaman (complete with new head sculpts) in the ***JLA Action Figure Gift Set***—and to make it doubly memorable, they're adding a full-sized comic book compiling material from ***JLA 80-Page Giant #1, JLA Secret Files #3, JLA #77, & JLA Gallery.***

DC Direct continues its ultra-limited high-quality fully functional marionette series with the ***Batman Marionette.*** Featuring meticulously detailed craftsmanship, this high-end, limited-edition marionette features hand-painted, cold-cast porcelain hands, feet and head and stands 17.25" tall and includes a Batarang accessory, Bat-shaped hand control, an adjustable black enamel metal stand, and a booklet providing instructions for use.

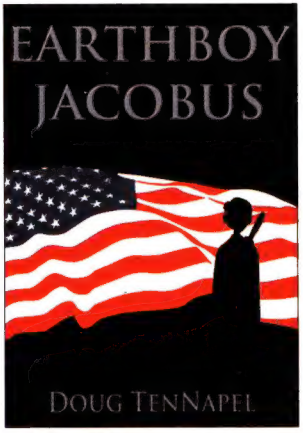
Coming Comics Image in May

City of Heroes comes to Image with an all-new series by *Mark Waid & David Nakayama.* Paragon City is a Silver-Age superheroic wonderland—until the reality and terrors of the modern age catch up to its defenders in one awful and shocking moment! Now the defenders of Paragon will find out once and for all what a *real* hero is in today's world! The first issue features three variant covers by *Rodolfo Migliari, Dale Keown, & George Pérez.*

Keith Giffen, Shannon Denton, & Jean-Jacques Dzialowski take readers back to the WWII era in ***Common Foe,*** a four-issue limited series. Amid the blood and chaos of the Battle of the Bulge, a battered squad of American soldiers and a platoon of German infantry do everything they can to rip each other to shreds. But to survive the night, the two enemies must come together and unite against an ancient evil hell bent on destroying everything in its path.

Joseph Michael Linsner fans will another look into his sketchbooks—and that's just what the ***Dawn 2005 Convention Sketchbook*** offers. Dawn as a fairy, Dawn as a mermaid, Dawn as a sex kitten–many faces of feminine beauty are on display in this 32-page collection of full-color Linsner paintings and sketches produced for commissions and conventions, complemented by exclusive commentary from Linsner.

A police chief witnesses a lot of strange things in the course of his job... but a flying whale? That's just the start of Chief Edwards' memorable journey that's the focus of ***Earthboy Jacobus,*** a 272-page graphic novel by *Doug Tennapel.* Actually, Chief Edwards has just become ex-Chief Edwards, since he's on his way home from his own retirement when he has the run-in with the



aforementioned whale. From within the strange beast emerges a boy named Jacobus... a boy from a parallel universe. Edwards discovers that a society of insect monsters want to kill this boy due to a mysterious virus that grows on his hand. The Chief becomes a father figure to the boy and trains him how to survive those who'd like to cut his life very short.

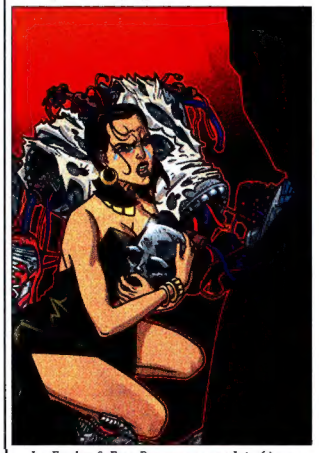
Jim Mahfood offers a visual interpretation of the work of a pair of rappers in ***Felt: True Tales of Underground Hip-Hop.*** Do we have to tell you that this isn't suitable for all ages?

Joshua & Jonathan Luna, the brothers who brought you the female-friendly ***Ultra,*** introduce readers to another complex female character in ***Girls.*** The book tells the story of the woman who changes the life of Ethan Daniels, a typical bachelor who is all too aware of the complexities of the opposite sex. One night, he bumps into a mysterious woman who will change his life... and maybe even the world.

Where do super-powered kids go for their summer break? Why, they go to ***Hero Camp,*** of course! This new series by *Greg Thompson & Robbi Rodriguez* follows Eric Quinlan, a boy who doesn't really *belong* at Hero Camp; while his parents have super-powers, he seems to be totally normal. Soon enough, Eric finds himself lost in the woods

of Camp Enokchuk, being stalked by three super-villains who believe he really does have super-powers!

Don't believe the rumors out there; *Marc Silvestri* continues to supply the visuals for ***Hunter-Killer***—and just wait til you see what he and *Mark Waid* have in store for you in ***Hunter-Killer #3!*** Another rogue Ultra-Sapien is on the loose—and the Hunter-Killer program has no choice but to send rookie Ellis into the field to handle him, despite the risk! For if Wolf finds Ellis before the mission's over, the two men could team to bring the entire program down!

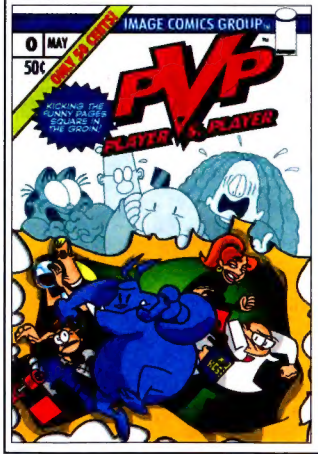


Jay Faerber & Fran Bueno answer a lot of important questions in ***Noble Causes #11.*** Will Doc regain his old body? Will Celeste's new, heroic attitude stick? Will Rusty ever be found? Will Frost keep Cosmic Rae's secret? All those questions–and more–will be answered!

Ivan Brandon, Miles Gunter, & Andy MacDonald invite readers to pay another visit to a techno-New York in ***NYC Mech: Beta Love***. The star of the book is Quentin, a bored bus driver who keeps out of trouble…until a standard route brings the excitement he's always wanted at the risk of his life. With the world speeding by and control slipping out of his fingers, Quentin finds love at the wrong end of a gun.

The Pact #2 offers *Jay Faerber, Carlos Barberi, & Juan Vlasco* a chance to take Image's new teen superteam on another adventure. This time out, they're racing to prevent a giant asteroid from crashing into the Earth!

Want an inexpensive way to sample *Scott Kurtz's* zany gamer-humor? Then ***PvP #0*** is the book for you—it's a sixteen-page 50¢ comic that offers a whimsical sampling of Kurtz's distinctive silliness.



As *Jim Valentino* first revealed in this issue's front-page story, ***ShadowHawk*** is returning in May in a new series by Valentino, *Jim Keplinger, Carlos Rodriguez, & Albert Puig*. When Eddie Collins and his father moved to New York, Eddie was given a mystical helmet and became the last in a line of legendary heroes dating back to Ancient Egypt. But does even ShadowHawk have the power to stop the man called BackLight? Plus, a former hero awakens from a deep coma…and goes mad!

J.M. DeMatteis & Mike Ploog, the team responsible for the brilliant all-ages fantasy ***Abadazad***, reunite for a another all-ages fantasy tale with a darker bent. ***The Stardust Kid*** introduces readers to Cody DiMarco, who went to bed a normal boy in a normal world... but when he woke up, that world was gone. He finds himself trapped with other children in a world unlike anything they've ever seen—and their only chance to return home is the Stardust Kid...

The Monster War continues in ***Tomb Raider Vs. the Wolf-Men: Monster War #2,*** by *Chris Golden, Tom Sniegoski, & Joyce Chin*. The Magdalena has been infected by the bite of Dracula, and is slowly becoming one of the undead. It's up to Tomb Raider Lara Croft and the mysterious Dr. Jekyll to search out the only know cure in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania, where they do battle with a savage pack of Wolf-Men! Meanwhile, the monstrous Mr. Hyde moves ahead in his insidious plans to bring about the apocalypse.

The history of Top Cow is spotlighted in ***Top Cow Art: The Coffee Table Collection,*** featuring gorgeous art—including many previously-unseen pieces—by *Marc Silvestri, David Finch, Michael Turner, Dale Keown, Alex Ross, Gary Frank* and others.

Image's collected editions for May include:

- ***Battle of the Planets Digest Volume Three,*** collecting the six-issue limited series by *David Wohl & Wilson Tortosa*, along with ***Battle of the Planets #1/2*** and the ***Battlebook***;
- ***Deep Sleeper,***, collecting the somnambulistic saga by *Phil Hester & Mike Huddleston*; and
- ***Slop: Anacleta,*** collecting the best material from the five-year run of *Dave Crosland & Debbie's* out-of-print minicomic ***Slop***;

Coming Comics
Dark Horse in May

Dark Horse revisits the world of ***Aliens Vs. Predator*** with ***Aliens Vs. Predator Volume Two: Civilized Beasts,*** a digest-sized graphic novel by *Mike Kennedy & Roger Robinson*. This tale is set on a new world that offered an unspoiled frontier perfect for colonization, a virtual paradise of boundless beauty and limitless resources, untouched by human hands...but not untouched, as the unsuspecting colonists soon discovered. Now marooned on a planet infested with the deadliest Alien species ever encountered, the colonists learn firsthand the Law of the Jungle:

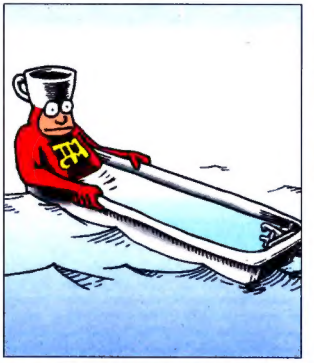
adapt or become extinct. And a little helping hand couldn't hurt, inexplicably provided by the selfsame Predators who destroyed the colonists' ship and made them prisoners in paradise.

Kurt Busiek, Cary Nord, & Thomas Yeates kick off the third major story arc in the Conan saga in ***Conan #16***. This tale begins with Conan once again rejecting civilization, but quickly learning that sorcery reaches out into the wild as well.

Tim Biskup lets readers wander through his artistic imagination in ***The Jackson 500 Volume One,*** a 112-page hardcover featuring a cornucopia of spontaneous compositions featuring birds, beasts, and characters in the first one hundred in an eventual series of five-hundred business-card-sized paintings reproduced at actual size.

Bruce Campbell, well known to fans of his work on ***Army of Darkness, Bubba Ho-Tep,*** or the cult fave ***The Adventures of Briscoe County Jr.,*** joins with *David goodman, Rick Remender, & Hilary Barta* to present a comic book adaptation of his upcoming feature film ***Man With the Screaming Brain,*** offering comic fans a "director's cut" version of the film before the film itself even hits the theaters. ***Man with the Screaming Brain*** tells the story of a wealthy American businessman determined to exploit the crippled economy of a former Soviet state now torn between communist roots and capitalist greed. Campbell's character hits on the wrong gypsy girl and lands in the grip of a mad scientist determined to get rich off a twisted brain-transplant scheme worthy of Dr. Frankenstein. This is the version of the script that Campbell wanted to shoot before budgetary constraints forced them to scale back his vision.

Shannon Wheeler offers a guide to self-fulfillment and inner peace in ***Too Much Coffee Man: How to Be Happy.*** In this offbeat and off-sized volume, the hyper-maniacal, coffee-cup-headed anti-hero laments the state of American democracy, global warming, living under the confusing cloud of terrorist threats, sexual politics, debilitating personal neuroses, and all sorts of other really fun and lighthearted topics!



Dark Horse collected editions for May/June include::

- ***Blade of the Immortal Volume Fourteen: Last Blood,*** collecting the latest full story arc by *Horaki Samura;*
- ***Little Lulu Sunday Afternoon,*** a 208-page trade paperback collecting more *John Stanley & Irving Tripp* tales from the acclaimed ***Little Lulu*** series;
- ***Samurai Executioner Volume Six,*** continuing the ***Lone Wolf & Cub*** prequel series by *Kazuo Koike & Goseki Kojima;*
- ***Star Wars: Clone Wars Volume Six—On the Fields of Battle,*** featuring Mace Windu, Aayla Secura, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Anakin Skywalker; and
- ***What's Michael? Volume Ten: Sleepless Nights,*** a new assemblage of cat-focused tales that'll ring true to any felinie lover.

By popular demand, CSN offers a list of first issues, zero issues, and stand-alone single issues making their appearance in March. The First Faves choices are listed, followed by the remainder of the month's premiere issuese; each listing carries a Diamond Comic Distributors' code number after the publisher's name for each item. This way, if you're interested in an item that your friendly local comic shop doesn't routinely stock, you can tell them exactly how to locate and order it for you!

First Faves
The best first issues March has to offer!

- **86 VOLTZ: DEAD GIRL** 3/30 Image JAN051586 $5.95
  Bryan J.L. Glass & Michael Avon Oeming introduce a dead girl brought back to life by lightning... but who is she? Or who was she?
- **ARMOR X #1** 3/2 Image JAN051588 $2.95
  Will great power redeem a teenager, or corrupt him entirely?
- **ASPEN SEASONS—SPRING 2005 #1** Aspen JAN052494 $2.99
  Featuring three brand-new stories starring Fathom, Cannon and Soulfire
- **BARBAROSSA AND THE LOST CORSAIRS #1** Kandora JAN052849 $3.50
  Brian Augustyn, H.S. Park, Transparency Digital follow a pirate ship out of a deadly storm and into a strange new world where monsters dwell and anything can happen
- **BLOOD OF THE DEMON #1** 3/9 DC JAN050291 $2.50
  John Byrne, Will Pfeifer, & Bud LaRosa explore the blood bond between Jason Blood and the Demon Etrigan
- **BRIAN PULIDO'S WAR ANGEL #1** Avatar JAN052516 $3.50
  War Angel is an epic, demented, over-the-top, ultraviolent, post-apocalyptic nightmare starring an assassin-for-hire created by Brian Pulido
- **CAL MCDONALD: SUPERNATURAL FREAK MACHINE #1** IDW JAN052818 $3.99
  New noir-horror tale by Steve Niles & Kelley Jones

- **DC COUNTDOWN #1** 3/30 DC JAN050296 $1.00
  Geoff Johns, Greg Rucka, and Judd Winick join an all-star roster of artists that includes Rags Morales, Ivan Reis, Phil Jimenez, Jesus Saiz, and cover illustrators Jim Lee & Alex Ross for DC Countdown, an 80-page Spectacular with the incredibly low cover price of $1.00. Countdown is an essential project that features nearly every major character operating in the DC Universe. It's a project that will resonate for months to come and is a perfect jumping-on point for readers who've been wondering where the people who helped deliver Identity Crisis could possibly be going next

DEADWORLD #1 3/9 Desperado/Image JAN051592 $3.50
Gary Reed's seminal zombie series returns with all-new stories illustrated by Vince Locke

DEVIL DOES EXIST VOL 1 3/30 CMX/DC JAN050341 $9.99
High school is hard for Kayano. When she tries to confess her love to the kind but distant Yuichi, the school bully Takeru makes her life hell. But things get worse when Kayano's mother gets engaged to Takeru's father, the school principal

EL NINO 3/30 Humanoids/DC JAN050344 $17.99
This modern-day "Heart of Darkness" follows Vera, a young Red Cross delegate who goes in search of a brother whose existence she had ignored

FATHOM #0 Aspen JAN052492 $2.50
Featuring an all new 12 page story that sets the stage for the new Fathom #1 issue coming this June

G.I. JOE: ARASHIKAGE SHOWDOWN SN Devil's Due JAN052611 $10.95
B&W manga-style GI Joe grpahic novel focusing on the Arashikage Ninja Clan, the tie that binds Snake-Eyes, Jinx, and Storm Shadow

HOPELESS SAVAGES: B-SIDES ALL-FLASHBACK SPECIAL 3/16 Oni JAN052899 $2.99
The Secret Origin of Zero's band is finally revealed

HUMAN RACE #1 3/16 DC JAN050305 $2.99
Miniseries by Ben Raab, Justiniano, & Walden Wong. The super-powered fraternity of Delta Chi Delta is charged with a mission: to protect the genetic code of the human race from any outside interference. But when a young man's entire hometown is invaded by an alien force, the threat of a global mutation compels him to join the group - especially when he manifests strange powers of his own

IMAGINARIES #1 3/16 Image JAN051602 $2.95
What happens to the imaginary friends, the childhood superheroes, the playmates and stuffed animals when the children who gave them life no longer believe in them? They go to the Imagined Nation. Join Superhero G as he explores this strange new world populated by imaginary figments of billions of children around the world

LEX LUTHOR: MAN OF STEEL #1 3/2 DC JAN050288 $2.99
Brian Azzarello teams up with Lee Bermejo for a bold story in which readers get a glimpse into the mind of Lex Luthor. Long considered one of DC's most vile villains, this series reveals why Luthor chooses to be the proverbial thorn in Superman's side - simply put, to save humanity from an untrusted alien being. Or, as Azzarello himself puts it, 'In this story, Superman is the villain.'

MARY JANE: HOMECOMING #1 3/9 Marvel JAN051817 $2.99
MJ is finally over Spider-Man and excited to go to Homecoming with her boyfriend, Harry Osborn. But unless Harry's dad sees an improvement in his son's slipping grades, Harry can forget about ever seeing Mary Jane again

MONSTER COLLECTION VOL 1 3/9 CMX/DC JAN050342 $9.99
Kasche may have a talent for controlling beasts, but she's got a lot to learn about self-control before she can become a full-fledged summoner

NEGATIVE BURN WINTER 2005 #1 3/23 Desperado/Image JAN051608 $9.95
Joe Pruett's anthology series returns with new material by Brian Bolland, Bob Burden, Zander cannon, Evan Dorkin, Phil Hester, Erik Larsen, Vince Locke, Jimmy Palmiotti, and many more

NEW WEST #1 3/23 Wizard JAN052344 $4.99
Near-future mystery-suspense series by Jimmy Palmiotti & Phil Noto

OTHERWORLD #1 3/30 Vertigo/DC JAN050377 $2.99
Phil Jimenez makes his Vertigo debut with this epic maxiseries that combines the dramatic setup and ensemble cast of Lost and Survivor with the fantasy of the Lord of the Rings trilogy and mind-bending technology of The Matrix. Picture a world at war with itself. An idyllic, pastoral land populated by mythological beings that battle endlessly with a nation-state made of pure technology. Into this maelstrom is thrust a group of young people - some friends, some strangers - plucked violently from Earth and imbued with superpowers. One in particular, Siobhan Moynihan - an aspiring singer and college student - is told she's the savior who will either end the war and save the Otherworld... or destroy it forever

PACT #1 3/9 Image JAN051610 $2.99
Firebreather! Invincible! ShadowHawk! Zephyr! Four super powered teenagers from dysfunctional families band together to discover the heroes within. Every issue of this miniseries is self-contained, and each is written by one of the main character's creator: #1 by Jim Valentino

RAYMOND FEIST'S WOOD BOY #1 3/16 Image JAN051638 $2.95
Adapting the short story by Raymond E. Feist; art by Mat Broome

RAZOR'S EDGE: REDBIRD #1 3/23 WildStorm/DC JAN050347 $2.99
Jason Pearson & Ed Brubaker weave a 5-part tale about former Black Ops member Nataly Lakota, a.k.a. Redbird

SEVEN SOLDIERS: GUARDIAN #1 3/23 DC JAN050317 $2.99
Grant Morrison and Cameron Stewart present a 4-issue miniseries that weaves a tale of Guardian, a hero who's the living masthead of the Manhattan Guardian newspaper - the only newspaper that lives up to its credo: 'We don't just report crime—we fight crime!'

SEVEN SOLDIERS: SHINING KNIGHT #1 3/9 DC JAN050318 $2.99
Grant Morrison & Simone Bianchi kick off a miniseries best described as The Lord of the Rings meets The O.C.! Though twilight and red ruin falls on Camelot, the Knights of the Broken Table stand ready to battle the forces of the Beyond. Little do they realize that the only one within their spent and bloodied ranks who can save what remains of their world is 16-year-old Sir Justin, a teenaged warrior who, with his winged horse Victory, finds himself thrust into the maddening world of the 21st century

SPELLBINDERS #1 3/23 Marvel JAN051799 $2.99
When fifteen-year-old Kim Vesco moves from Chicago to Salem, MA, she finds that the local student body is divided into rival factions of witches and non-witches, with both sides bidding for her allegiance

SPIDER-MAN TEAM UP SPECIAL 3/9 Marvel JAN051821 $2.99
Featuring Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four

STAR WARS: GENERAL GRIEVOUS #1 3/16 Dark Horse JAN050046 $2.99
On a rescue mission to Vandos, Padawan Flynn Kybo and his master T'chooka D'oon come face to face with one of the leaders of the Separatist army, General Grievous

ULTIMATE IRON MAN #1 3/2 Marvel JAN051798 $2.99
Orscon Scott Card & Andy Kubert explore the origins of the Ultimate Iron Man

ULTIMATE SECRET #1 3/30 Marvel JAN051810 $2.99
Warren Ellis & Steve McNiven introduce the Ultimate Captain Marvel

WOLVERINE: SOULTAKER #1 3/9 Marvel JAN051853 $2.99
Wolverine returns to Japan only to get caught in the middle of an ancient war between gods and demons

X-MEN—AGE OF APOCALYPSE #1 3/2 Marvel JAN051802 $2.99
Apocalypse has been destroyed; the end of the world has been averted. Or has it? Sinister has just unleashed a massive force unseen, unrivaled, and unbeatable. Magneto and the X-Men's only hope lies in tracking down a retired Weapon X! Weekly miniseries by Akira Yoshida & Chris Bachalo

X-MEN—AGE OF APOCALYPSE ONE-SHOT 3/2 Marvel JAN051808 $3.99
Marvel's celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Age of Apocalypse begins here! Many of the creators involved in the original Age of Apocalypse event return for this special double-sized issue, including a special pin-up section

X-MEN—THE END: HEROES AND MARTYRS #1 3/9 Marvel JAN051862 $2.99
The eighteen part X-Men: The End saga by Claremont continues with the first part of the second miniseries

YOSHITAKA AMANO'S HERO VOL 1 3/16 Speakeasy JAN052935 $9.99
The illustrator of Sandman: The Dream Hunters launches his own creation - Hero

FANTASTIC FIRSTS
OTHER MARCH FIRST ISSUES

ANGEL SHOP VOL 1 3/9 CPM JAN052586 $9.99

ANYWHERE BUT HERE Fantagraphics JAN052743 $12.95

APC PREVIEW 2005 APC JAN052471 $3.50
Offering a sneak peek at upcoming titles such as Mythlands, The Gloom, Black Mist, Darkham Vale: Uprising and much much more

ATOMIKA #1 3/9 Speakeasy JAN052932 $2.99
In an alternate world, Atomika is the first man-made deity - both a god of technology and of the 21st century. Now he must hunt down and kill the ancient gods who have ruled the world of man since the dawn of time

BANZAI GIRL FABULOUS FOTO BOOK Sirius JAN052921 $3.95

BLOOD OF THE DEMON #1 SGN DF JAN052726 $19.99

BLOODLINE CHRONICLES Ibooks JAN052816 $13.95

BLOODRAYNE: SEEDS OF SIN Digital Webbing JAN052654 $3.99
Story Christina Z, Kody Chamberlain, & Steven O'Connell inspired by videogame

BY THE SWORD MANGA VOL 1 3/9 ADV JAN052388 $9.99

CASTLEVANIA: THE BELMONT LEGACY #1 IDW JAN052820 $3.99
Horror tale based on videogame

CHIP WILDE #1 Mecca JAN052862 $2.99
Western series illustrated by Dick Ayers

CROMARTIE HIGH SCHOOL MANGA VOL 1 3/9 ADV JAN052387 $10.99

CROUCHING TIGER HIDDEN DRAGON VOL 1 REVISED & EXPANDED ED HK JAN052808 $13.95

DARKNESS & TOMB RAIDER #1 Image JAN051654 $2.99

DEATH TRANCE VOL 1 3/16 AnimeWorks JAN052447 $9.99

FILLER AiT/PlanetLar JAN052407 $12.95

FRANKENSTEIN: NOW AND FOREVER Typocrat JAN053040 $19.95

GENERIC MINI-SERIES #1 Comics Conspiracy JAN052585 $2.25

GRAVE GRRARLS: DESTROYERS OF THE DEAD #1 Moonstone JAN052866 $3.50
"Enhanced" government agents versus zombies

GUNPARADE MARCH ANIME VOL 1 3/16 AnimeWorks JAN052448 $9.99

HACK/SLASH: COMIC BOOK CARNAGE Devil's Due JAN052620 $4.95
A slasher invades the Whizzer World Comic Convention

HARD BOILED ANGEL ANGEL DETECTIVE VOL 1 3/2 CPM JAN052588 $9.99

HELLO AGAIN Top Shelf JAN053035 $10.00

IN DREAM WORLD VOL 1 TokyoPop JAN052944 $9.99

I'S VOL 1 3/30 Viz JAN053079 $7.99

JUNK FORCE VOL 1 Dr. Master JAN052662 $7.95

KIDS' JOKER MANGA VOL 1 3/9 ADV JAN052390 $9.99

KOLCHAK NIGHT STALKER: EVE OF TERROR SN Moonstone JAN052871 $5.95

KYRIE MANGA VOL 1 3/9 ADV JAN052392 $9.99

LITTLE BOOK OF HORROR: FRANKENSTEIN HC IDW JAN052830 $15.99
Excerpts from Shelley's novel, with illustrations by Scott Morse

MANGA DARKCHYLDE #1 SGN DF JAN052724 $19.99

MARVEL MILESTONE: IRON MAN 3/30 Marvel JAN051838 $3.99
Reprinting the origins of Iron Man, Ant-Man, and Captain America

MINISULK Top Shelf JAN053031 $8.00
Humorous short story collection by Jeffrey Brown

MISS BETTER LIVING THROUGH CRIME 3/16 Humanoids/DC JAN050346 $19.99
Graphic novel tells the tale of two unlikely partners in crime, Nola and Slim

MOONSTONE MONSTERS: ZOMBIES #1 Moonstone JAN052872 $2.95

NOODLE FIGHTER MIKI MANGA VOL 1 3/9 ADV JAN052394 $9.99

ODDLY NORMAL #1 Viper JAN053042 $2.95
Oddly is a 10 year-old girl with the most unfortunate name and the luck to go with it

OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE: X-MEN AGE APOCALYPSE 2005 3/23 Marvel JAN051807 $3.99

ORPHEN MANGA VOL 1 3/9 ADV JAN052396 $9.99

PAUL MOVES OUT HC D&Q JAN052669 $19.95

POPBOT READER #1 IDW JAN052831 $5.99
Contains a brand-new Popbot story penned by Adam Warren with art by Ashley Woodimself, as well as a gallery featuring images of Popbot by some of the biggest names in comic art

RANDOM ENCOUNTER #1 Viper JAN053043 $2.95
Interrupted by a strange sound while playing the latest Silent Kill game, Migo, Mica, and Mona discover a dead girl on the Kwik Mart's roof

RG VEDA VOL 1 TokyoPop JAN052945 $9.99

ROBOCOP: WAR PARTY #1 Avatar JAN052501 $3.99

SEA OF RED #1 3/23 Image JAN051615 $2.95
Sea of Red tells the tale of a young sailor turned undead by the crew of a cursed Pirate ship, his century-spanning search for revenge and the tricks that time plays on the mind

SHARKNIFE VOL 1 3/30 Oni JAN052893 $9.95

SOKORA REFUGEES VOL 1 TokyoPop JAN052942 $9.99

SPACE SHERIFF & HAPPY SPACE BOY VOL 1 Data Red JAN052603 $8.95

THE GRIMOIRE #1 3/23 Speakeasy JAN052934 $2.99
Horror fantasy by Sebastien Ciasse and Dijef

TIMES TWO VOL 1 3/2 Viz DEC042979 $9.99

TOP COW BIBLE Image JAN051661 $9.99

ULTIMATE IRON MAN #1 SGN DF JAN052717 $19.99

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ULTIMATE SECRET #2 MORALES SGN DF JAN052719 $19.99

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VOLCANO HIGH ORIGIN VOL 1 3/16 AnimeWorks JAN052449 $9.99

WITCHBLADE & TOMB RAIDER #1 Image JAN051653 $2.99

WITCHBLADE & TOMB RAIDER B&W CVR #1 DF JAN052700 $14.95

WOLVERINE: SOULTAKER #1 SGN DF JAN052721 $69.99

X-MEN—THE END: HEROES & MARTYRS #1 CHEN SGN DF JAN052716 $19.99

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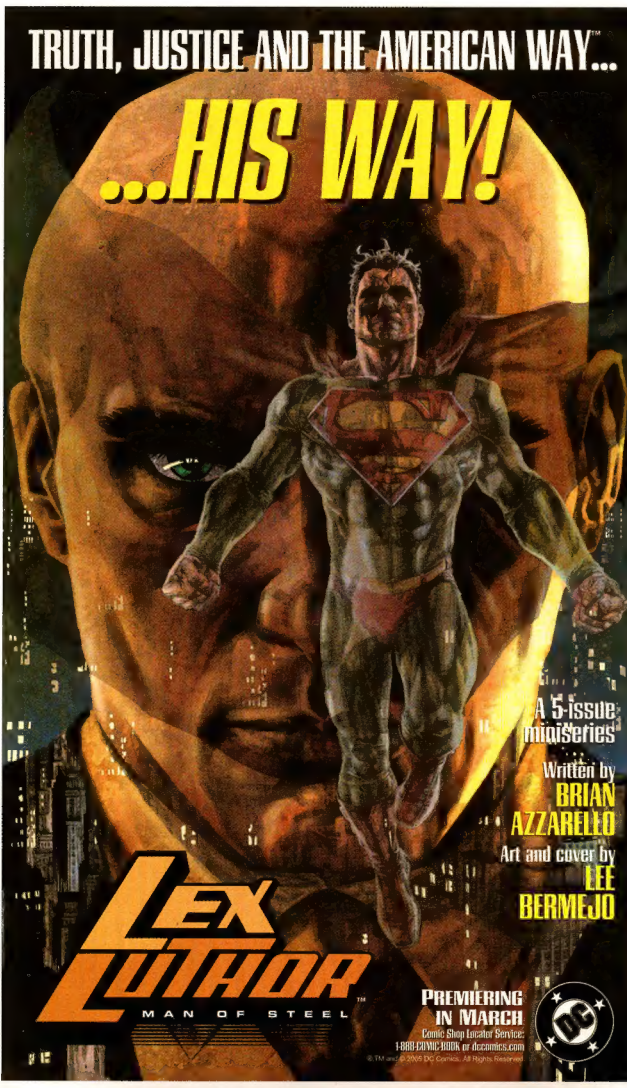
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Art and cover by
LEE BERMEJO
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